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Foreward

“The following plan for the Near Northside, like many such plans, has many facts, figures and maps. But behind these lies a vision for how a neighborhood might grow and develop. A vision not developed by city planners or outside consultants, though such individuals played a vital role in its development. Rather, it is a vision for a neighborhood developed by that very neighborhood. Through countless Steering Committee meetings and public sessions over a year’s time community members developed this plan. It is their plan for their neighborhood. My goal is to help them realize their vision. Subsequently, the Steering Committee has become the core of the super neighborhood council for this area and fittingly, they have named their council the “Northside Village Super Neighborhood.” Congratulations and “thank you” to all who participated and all that may benefit from this effort.”

Gabriel Vasquez
Council Member District H

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Executive Summary

The Near Northside Neighborhood, (renamed as the Northside Village by the Superneighborhood Council) located just north of Houston's downtown and connected through Main Street, is easily accessible from I-45 and I-10. A portion of the neighborhood, from I-10 to Boundary along Main Street, is part of the Main Street Revitalization Corridor.

In the past several years, downtown and the Main Street Corridor have undergone tremendous change, due in part to the development of the Metro Light Rail System on Main Street. For Northside Village, the question is how the neighborhood will take advantage of the opportunities its proximity to downtown and the light rail system present. Now, with the development of the Northside Village Economic Revitalization Plan, the neighborhood has a "roadmap" to address the future and to establish its identity as a vital urban, inner-city neighborhood. The Plan reflects the community's goals and visions about its future and charts a course of action.

Northside Village has many assets and is an important part of the central city. Whatever affects the central core affects Northside Village. The ultimate goal of the plan is to capture, emphasize, formalize and glorify the key aspects that make Northside Village the community its citizens enjoy. The strategies developed will become their roadmap for the future.

Plan Process and Overview

In 2001, the City of Houston received a HUD Community Technology Initiative grant, which together with an FHWA grant for the Main Street Revitalization Project and a contribution from Avenue CDC, funded the preparation of the Northside Village Economic Revitalization Plan. Webb Architects and Associates, a consultant group, was selected to prepare the plan. Running parallel to this planning effort, the consultant teams of Social Compact, Inc. and Environmental Simulation Center, Ltd were

conducting two separate efforts which would eventually tie into this economic development plan effort.

Social Compact, Inc. conducted the 'Houston Neighborhood Market Drill Down'- a retail market study for Houston's inner-city neighborhoods within the federally designated boundary of EEC (Enhanced Enterprise Community). Northside Village is one of sixteen neighborhoods that participated in the study. The study's non-traditional approach identified the hidden strengths of Northside's markets that were not recognized or reported by traditional market analysis. Major strengths include: a larger population, higher aggregate household income, greater buying power, and a substantial cash economy (See Appendix for details). By demonstrating that the community has tremendous untapped potential for attracting new businesses and investment to its neighborhoods, the Social Compact study provides a valuable marketing tool to stimulate economic development in Northside Village, and provides a headstart for the successful implementation of the Northside Village Economic Revitalization Plan.

Environmental Simulation Center, Ltd conducted three workshops to identify community preferences for character and design of major commercial corridors in Northside Village. Utilizing computer-simulation technology, they transformed these preferences to design alternatives and created a digital model of the neighborhood. Using this computer model, the community evaluated the positive and negative aspects of alternative design concepts and identified the preferred design alternative. These were then refined into specific corridor design guidelines. Widely supported by the community, implementation of these guidelines for future commercial development in the corridors can create an attractive streetscape environment and boost the local economy by attracting more businesses, more residents, and more patrons and visitors.

Community Input

A steering committee of community stakeholders was established to provide community input and act as a sounding board, compass and resource to the consultant group. The Steering Committee met frequently over a period of 9 months; members included neighborhood civic associations, neighborhood service organizations, the school district, business organizations, Avenue CDC and others. Interviews were conducted with property owner and other stakeholders. An Advisory Committee also was formed to provide input from governmental agencies.

Three community-wide workshops were held to present ideas to the community and receive public comment. The initial community-wide workshop on May 19, 2002 was oriented to identify issues, problems and assets in the community through facilitated discussion groups, and a question and answer session. The second workshop keyed on ensuring that the consultant team was on target regarding community issues, transportation, strategies for change and concepts for new development. At the final workshop, strategies and recommendations were presented. All three workshops were well attended with over 100 participants at each.

The Plan

The Northside Village Economic Revitalization Plan is a roadmap to lead the community into the future. The Plan addresses the issues of quality of life and the economic future of the neighborhood through several tools:

1) Urban Design Guidelines. One of the Northside Village's major concerns has been how to encourage and attract new development and investment, while at the same time, maintaining those characteristics that reinforce and contribute to the "small village" feel of the area. Because current development regulations do not exist which adequately accommodate the protection of

neighborhood character, a set of *design guidelines* for new development and revitalization were developed as part of this Master Plan. These guidelines identify development practices through which the community's desired character can be reinforced and maintained.

2) Major Economic Nodes & New Development Opportunities. The plan identifies opportunities for economic development and infill potential. Economic Development Nodes (EDNs), major commercial activity areas, along Main and Irvington and other areas of the Northside Village can become the focus of new, neighborhood-oriented, pedestrian friendly development. These EDNs paint possible, economic-development scenarios in the Northside Village that could stimulate new economic development by making the area more inviting, convenient, and livable.

3) Strategies for Implementation. Land use, economic development, physical improvements, housing and historic preservation are addressed through various strategies and actions. Strategies include (1) Partnership development, (2) Marketing/Outreach and (3) Financing Options.

These three tools form the backbone of the plan and the means for helping Northside Village accomplish the goals and priorities identified by the community.

